

Public Works Committee  
meeting of Tuesday, November 1, 2005  
1st floor meeting room, Town Hall

present: Vince O'Connor, Michael Cann, Guilford Mooring, Rob Crowner  
guests: Walter Wolnik, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Richard Alcorn, Edie MacMullen,  
Andrew Melnechuk, Jonathan Tucker

1. Vince agrees to facilitate in the absence of the chair, and calls the meeting to order at 7:15pm. The main business of this meeting will be discussion of Articles 4, 10, and 12 of the Fall Town Meeting, for the purpose of determining whether the committee will take a position on them.

2. Article 10: Public Transportation plan

Richard reads the final wording of the motion. The requested funding would come from the transportation enterprise fund, and so could be argued to be "off budget". A Pioneer Valley Planning Commission matching grant would not be available for a project represented as a component of a comprehensive plan; if designated for a "transportation plan", additional PVPC funding would be possible. Northampton was able to accomplish a \$65,000 transportation survey with only \$25,000 in town money. There would be two main parts of an Amherst project: an inventory of what exists, and a strategy about how to improve it.

Hwei-Ling asks whether there would be an obligation to put out for bid a contract for assistance in creating the transportation plan. Guilford states that the PVPC as a "quasi" government agency would be exempt from such a process.

Richard concedes the potential for the PVPC to project its own agenda into the plan if brought into the process, but argues that transportation is a regional issue anyway.

Guilford explains that the transportation component of a master plan can be done either by the Comprehensive Planning Committee or by the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee, as proposed by this article, and integrated into the master plan when complete. There are pros and cons to either approach. For this article, an advantage would be access to money outside the CPC plan; a disadvantage would be a transportation plan that exists outside the master plan (which could also be seen as a potential advantage). Richard points out that a fully-realized transportation component would still need to come from the CPC process because of the land-use issues that impact transportation, which this article would not be addressing.

Vince asks whether it is known that the transportation enterprise fund can "afford" this request. Richard believes that will be determined in the affirmative before Town Meeting begins. Guilford explains that billing for PVPC services on this project would take into consideration "in kind" work performed by the town, though such work cannot have already taken place. Vince recommends examining the Northampton plan to see what might be offered as

in-kind work so as to reduce the expenditure from the enterprise fund. Jonathan points out that a request for technical assistance from the PVPC should be made by the PVPC representative from the Planning Board. Michael thinks the Public Works Committee may be straying too far from its mandate if it considers making recommendations on such issues as funding sources. He states that our focus should be on advising the DPW.

Vince recommends that the scope of a transportation plan include promotion of Amtrak, and asks whether there would be coordination with UMass, particularly with regard to possible bus outreach to Turner's Falls, where many grad students live. Richard notes that UMass already has a relationship with the PVPC, and thus is de facto aware of this issue.

Rob moves to recommend Article 10 to Town Meeting. The motion is approved by a vote of 2-0 with one abstention. Michael supports the article in concept but is not comfortable voting for PWC recommendation because he is not sure of the broader implications.

[Text of recommendation to Town Meeting: The Public Works Committee voted unanimously to recommend and support Article 10. Article 10 is consistent with processes that have already produced or are developing five other Comprehensive Plan components: Open Space (Conservation Commission and staff), Recreation (LSSE Commission and staff), Affordable Housing (Housing Partnership Committee and consultant), Sewer Plan (Select Board, Department of Public Works, and consultant), and Historic Preservation (Historical Commission and Planning Department).

The committee's discussion of funding for this project yielded an opinion that transportation planning work done on behalf of the Town by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission need not be put out to bid, in part because the Town's share could be accomplished either by in-kind work or by cash payments. The committee voted to recommend and support the study as proposed, leaving the final amount and method of funding to Select Board and other Town officials.

By invitation of the chair of the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee, the Public Works Committee agreed to coordinate, as part of a town transportation plan, its work with the Public Works Superintendent to review and recommend five-year plans for (1) construction of new sidewalks and repair of existing sidewalks, and (2) repair and reconstruction of town roads, including necessary drainage work and the installation of recommended bus pulloffs.]

### 3. Article 12: survey of commons

Jonathan provides documentation of the Historical Commission's preservation plan for the commons, including a long-term projected budget. He explains that the Historical Commission was caught off-guard by the appearance of this article on the preliminary draft of the warrant, in particular by language that suggested a "historical preservation" motivation, since the HC

was already working on its own preservation plan.

With regard to North Amherst and Cushman Village, Jonathan states that the HC makes a distinction between commons, which are public streets, and parks, which often originate in private property. He is concerned that incorrectly-done surveys might jeopardize the identification of these areas as commons or parks.

He states that all of the commons are in designated historic districts, so the state Historical Commission would have veto jurisdiction whenever a funding for a project that would impact them is suggested - though Guilford notes that this does not extend to Chapter 90 funding.

Edie wants to avoid jurisdictional conflict and work together, noting that a careful plan is already underway. She observes that human endeavors are not static, and that historically the commons have evolved as the needs of the community have evolved. The static allocation of functions should not be enshrined by a survey.

Edie notes that the Select Board can always step in as protector of the public byways to stop harm from coming to the commons and that the HC intends to make a recordable survey and hold public hearings as part of its plan. The HC regards it as an historical project, not a public works issue.

Vince states that it was never the intent of the PWC to initiate preservation of the commons, but merely to contribute to the process in a way the committee believed it was able. Guilford clarifies that the PWC cannot direct the work of the Superintendent of Public Works; only the Select Board can.

Hwei-Ling describes recent action of the Select Board taken in an attempt to reconcile the interests of the two committees. With language still being discussed, the Select Board would put a moratorium on takings of the commons and would review any proposed repair or alteration of the commons.

Jonathan states that surveying the commons might have the effect of causing them to cease being commons; they could be defined as parks instead. A survey showing boundaries - specifically of streets - might change what can be protected. Edie reiterates that the commons should be seen as commons, not "protected green space".

Vince explains that one of the motivations for doing surveys would be to provide the focal points for certain village centers to apply for block grants.

Jonathan and Edie describe the public participation process to date, stating that a significant effort has been made and that it has yielded a relatively high response, though they acknowledge that direct contact of the initiator of the commons protection article of three years ago may not have been made.

Michael moves that the PWC recommend dismissal of Article 12. Rob seconds the motion and it passes by a vote of 2-1.

[Text of motion to dismiss made before Town Meeting: The Public Works Committee introduced Article 12 in response to a petition article supporting protection of the town commons that was passed by Town Meeting a couple of

years ago. As the commons are legally part of the public way, the committee saw an opportunity to make a contribution to this goal by initiating the survey of these areas – such survey to be passed on to the Select Board or other town boards and committees with appropriate authority to coordinate a protection effort.

The committee believes there is value in Article 12, but after meeting with representatives of the Historical Commission and Planning Department, among others, the committee has agreed by a 2-1 vote to reconsider bringing forward the article at this time. We are satisfied that the Historical Commission's preservation plan provides for surveys of the South, East, and Town Center commons and similar "green spaces" in North Amherst and Cushman Village, and a public comment process. We also understand that the Select Board can and will exercise its authority to protect all of the commons while the Historical Commission study proceeds. So as not to confuse the efforts already underway, the Public Works Committee will move to dismiss Article 12.]

#### 4. Article 4 Main Street/Pelham Road bridge

Guilford explains that if easements are not in place when the design is ready, Mass Highways may pass over the project. Permission to negotiate the easements is the objective of the article.

Richard asks whether there will be an opportunity for the public to comment on the design plans. Guilford states that the state may hold hearings at the 25% and/or 75% readiness levels. Design work may or may not be ready by Spring Town Meeting.

Guilford explains that while the state owns all bridges, it is the towns they exist in that have maintenance responsibility. The estimated cost of this project is \$400,000, about half of which would be to construct a temporary bypass because the road must remain open for emergency vehicles. The town could opt to take on the project itself, but it would have to meet standards set by Mass Highways and the cost would likely be about the same.

Andrew asks whether the town could acquire a permanent easement and use it to widen the bridge for the purpose of adding bike lanes and widening the sidewalks. Guilford explains that under the state's "footprint program" for bridge repair, it is understood that surrounding property will be restored to its pre-construction conditions. He suggests that this issue could be raised at the 25% review hearing. Richard suggests that if the bridge could be considered to be in an urban district, then five-foot sidewalks could be put in. Guilford acknowledges that there might be some flexibility of interpretation there.

Vince moves to request the Superintendent to (a) convey the concerns about the project raised at this meeting to Mass Highways by letter, requesting written response; and (b) inform Mass Highways of the committee's interest in both 25% and 75% reviews, to which the Public Works Committee, Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee, and bridge neighbors (including Mr. Melnechuk) would be specifically invited. Guilford observes that widening the sidewalk or adding a shoulder would require the taking of private property and

so may not be realistic. He also notes that he cannot guarantee that a 25% review will be held and even if it is he may not necessarily receive notification of it in time to pass the word on to those named in the motion. Nevertheless, the committee approves the motion by a vote of 3-0.

Guilford states that the north side of the bridge area is a 21-E contamination site that WMECO is in the process of cleaning up, which is why an easement on that side is not being considered.

The committee votes 3-0 to recommend Article 4 to Town Meeting.

[Text of recommendation to Town Meeting: According to the procedure of the Massachusetts Highway Department, the Town competes for bridge construction funds in terms of its readiness to receive those funds when they become available. Replacement of the Main Street/Pelham Road bridge will require \$400,000, about half of which would go to a traffic-signal-controlled bypass lane on APR'ed farmland on the south side of the present bridge. Access to Pelham and to Amherst residences east of the bridge would, without the bypass lane, require too much time for public safety services. A construction easement is needed to site this bypass and to maintain the town's place in the bridge construction queue.

After unanimously requesting that the Superintendent of Public Works convey to Mass Highways (1) the concerns of Pelham Road residents regarding the replacement of this bridge, and (2) committee requests regarding the holding of and notification for 25% and 75% hearings, the Public Works Committee voted unanimously to support authorizing the Select Board to negotiate the easement described in Article 4. The committee took no position on whether the easement should be temporary or permanent. A permanent easement would require an additional Town Meeting vote and state approvals.]

#### 5. Report on October rainfall

Guilford states that the Columbus Day weekend rainfall included 7.5" on Saturday, with flooding beginning Sunday on East Leverett Road, Russellville Road, Station Road (exacerbated by beavers), West Pomeroy Lane, Pomeroy Court (exacerbated by beavers), Route 9 near Colonial Village, and Pondview. The bridge replacement on East Leverett Road will have no effect on future flooding events.

The following weekend, there was more rain but not as much flooding: only Pomeroy Court. However, there was a sewer backup that affected Rolling Ridge.

Walter mentions that he heard a different number for the first rainfall. There is a discussion about the different ways that rainfall is measured.

Guilford states that there was no flooding on Belchertown Road or University Drive, as happened during the summer. He has no explanation for this. Vince asks whether there is any DW remediation that can be done to address this season's flooding issues.

In response to a question from Hwei-Ling, Guilford states that the public

should be encouraged to clean off catch-basin entrances.

6. Preparations for winter

Guilford states that no changes in the sidewalk plowing policy are planned.

Walter suggests that people should be reminded about the town's sidewalk shovelling bylaw, perhaps by a notice included in the property tax or water bill. Guilford states that if a sidewalk is not being maintained, the police should be called, and a parking enforcement officer will be sent.

Walter asks whether the DPW policy on "punch-throughs" of piled snow at crosswalks and bus stops has changed. Guilford states that the department will do "punch-throughs", and best way to ensure that is to call the office when something needs to be done.

7. The meeting adjourns at 9:30pm.

The next meeting will be on December 6, 2005.

Respectfully submitted,  
Robert J. Crowner